

## Rejoicing when enemy falls

### Background

- God divides the sea so the Israelites can cross it.
- The sea closes back on the pursuing Egyptians, drowning them. (Ex. 14:28-29).
- Then the Israelites break into song ['Song of the Sea', shirat ha-yam] (Ex. 15:1-18).
- Talmud, Sanhedrin 39b:
  - In that hour the angels wished to sing a song [of praise] before the Holy One, blessed be He, but He rebuked them, saying:  
*Maasei yadai tov'im ba-yam, v'atem omrim shira?*  
(My handiwork is drowning in the sea, and you sing a song?)

### Discussion

*Why shouldn't you rejoice when your enemy falls, after he tried so hard to harm you?*

- It's natural. Supported by verse in Proverbs:  
*Va-avod resha'im rinna* (When the wicked perish, there is joy.) [Proverbs (11:10)]
- Also, we sing Hallel at the seder [praising God]. Are we not praising God indirectly for killing the pursuing Egyptians?  
*[Note: Based on this gemara, only a half Hallel is recited in the last 6 days of Pesach. (Shulchan Arukh, O.C. 490)]*
- One can even argue: If we did NOT rejoice, would that not be a rebuke to God? (We don't like the way you handled our deliverance?) Are we not supposed to praise God no matter what He does?
- Six-Day War, 1967 -- another miraculous defeat of the Egyptians. I, too, rejoiced from Cairo, Egypt, even though I knew I was about to pay for it. I did not feel apologetic.
- Another quote in Proverbs seems to support the Talmud:  
Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles, (Proverbs 24:17-18)

but doesn't really because it continues:

...lest the Lord see it and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from [your enemy].

So motivation is not empathy with enemy, but fear that God will sympathize with him on account of his misfortune.

(Close to popular wag: Never kick a man when he is down: He may get up!)

-Yet every life is precious:

Every single person must say: The world was created for my sake.  
(Sanhedrin 37a)

## **Resolution**

Talmud goes on to say:

Said R. Jose b. Hanina: [God] Himself does not rejoice, yet He causes others to rejoice. (Sanhedrin 39b)

→ Split the difference: Rejoice over your deliverance only, but not over your enemy hurting. A tall order, but we must try.